

A
LETTER
FROM A
DISSENTER
To the DIVINES of the
Church of England,
In order to a
UNION.

THIS is to let you know, Reverend Sirs, how sensible I and our Brethren are of the great Change we perceive in your *Pulpits*: that whereas sometime since, nothing was heard from thence but *Thunders* against *Dissenters*, with the terrible Noise of their *spirits of Obstinacy* and *Disobedience*, of *Rebellion* the Sin of *Witchcraft*, of their being *Signifiers* against the *True Church*; and that nothing was

so proper to reduce them into a *Christian Temper* and within the *Pale*, as the severe *Exercution* of the *Laws*; as *Summoning* to the *Commons*, *Seizing* and *Imprisoning*, &c. Now all this *Storm* is clear'd up into a perfect *Calm*, and instead of *Force* and *Rigor*, we hear nothing now but of *Fair Invitations*, and most *Obliging Calls* to a *Peaceable Union*; there being now no Difference to be heard of betwixt us, but only of a *Few Indifferent Ceremo-*

nies, and that otherwise, *We are all Joint-Members with You of the same Church.* This Change, I say, *We are all very Sensible of.* And as for a *Union* and a good Correspondence, you may be assur'd, we are all so in love with *Union* and *Peace*, that we could heartily wish, to see all Christians at this day, as they were in the time of the Apostles, of *One Spirit*, and of *One Mind.* But you know what has hinder'd us hitherto from *Joyning* with *Your Church*; We have always suspected You for *Papists in Masquerade*; The many ceremonies You have retain'd, Your *Crosses*, and *Altars*, and *Tapers*, and *Surplices*, and *Bowings*; Your *Confessions* and *Absolutions*, and *Mass-Forms* of Prayer, &c. have oblig'd us to these Thoughts; and that tho' you pretend to have left *Babylon*, yet by the *Rags* and *Livery* you brought along with you, we could not but still suspect you of her *Residue.*

Of late indeed you have given us some Reason to change our Opinion; whilst *Popery* making some approaches to you, and even standing at your Doors, you have given her such *Sour Entertainment*, and treated her with so much *Severity*, as if in reality you had no Kindness for her. This, I say, is some Motive to us, to change our former Opinion of you. And yet on the other hand, I see so many *Deceits in Villanous Men*, that I cannot tell how, but to be *Jealous* still. I fear *Your Religion*, may, like the *Weather*, have its different *Seasons* and *Returns.* And as sometimes the *Disfenters* from the Influence of your Church, lie under a severe and nipping *Winter*, and at other times again enjoy a warm and inviting *Sunshine*; so you may be as changeable in respect of the *Papists* too, sometimes for 'em and sometimes against 'em; and yet be the same *Old Church of England* still, like the *Sun*, which making different *Seasons* and *Changes* in the Year, yet never changes it self. And this Consideration do's not leave me without some

Fears and Jealousies. I apprehend you have a way of *promoting Popery*, and yet being against the *Papists*; and that if we joyn with you, we may be instructed in *real Popery*, whilst we are taught to *hate the Papists*; and if so, I do not see, but it would be the same thing to joyn with the *Papists*, as with you.

This Jealousie of mine has been strengthened of late by some of your Writings; and most especially by one, which appear'd lately, Entitled, *An Answer to the Compiler of the Nubes Testium*, wherein the Author, whilst he severely lets fly against the *Papists*, do's at the same time maintain and propagate such *Doctrins*, as I have ever look'd upon, as the very Essence and Groundwork of *Popery.* You'll give me leave to make a short List of such as I have observ'd in the perusing that Book; and then if you will give me your Opinion, and let me know, whether really they are conformable to the *Doctrine of your Church*, 'twill serve as a Light to direct us, what to do, whilst you invite us to joyn Communion with you.

First then he says, (p. 8.) *That he can grant, that the Bishop of Rome is the Successor of S. Peter.* 2. *That that See is the Center of the Catholic Communion, while possess'd by an Orthodox Bishop.* 3. *That whosoever Separates himself from it professing the true Faith, and possess'd by a Catholic Bishop, is guilty of Schism,* (p. 37.) 4. *He doubts whether there be really any Controversie about Tradition, betwixt the Church of Rome and the Church of England.* 5. *That the Tradition of the Catholic Church is to be receiv'd.* 6. *That by Tradition we receive the Holy Scriptures, and know how to separate the Scriptures from Apocryphal or Supposititious Writings.* 7. *That he is willing and ready to receive any Doctrine not written, that hath as perpetual, unanimous, and certain a Tradition as the Scripture; and that he only waits for the proving this, and then he is ready to embrace all the Doctrins of Popery,* (p. 38.)

8. *That there is no necessity of express Scripture for the Constitutions and Practices, which his Church enjoys, in order to the more regular and decent Service of God, (p. 41.)* 9. *That the Tradition of Antiquity is highly useful and necessary for the Interpretation of Points of Faith, (p. 43.)* 10. *That he Honors the Saints, in observing Days in honor of them: And seems to grant all that is produc'd in Nubes Testium upon that Subject, viz. In visiting Churches in honor of the Saints, whose Memory is there preserv'd; in assembling together in honor of the Saints, and Celebrating their Memory with a Religious Solemnity, so to be partakers of their Merits. 11. That it is generally piously believ'd, that the glorified Saints do Intercede for the Church Militant, (p. 49.)* 12. *That the Honor, which in Primitive Times was paid to the Memories of Saints, was nothing but what was highly just, and that herein they are Imitated by us, says he, as well as by any other Christians, (p. 50.)* 13. *That the Fathers kept the Relics of Saints with Respect and Veneration, and believ'd that God often wrought Miracles by them, and they might do it too, says this Author, (p. 51.)* 14. *That the Fathers practis'd Praying for the Dead; and own'd it as advantageous to the Souls departed: Every word of which we freely grant, says this Author, (p. 53.)* *That the Fathers in the First Ages us'd Oblations and Prayers for the Dead, no body denies, says he. We do confess withall, that these Prayers were offer'd up also for pardon of Sins, (p. 65.)* 15. *That it is the Opinion of his Church, that Christ's Body is really present in the Eucharist, (p. 66.)* 16. *That that Consecrated Food is the Flesh and Blood of Jesus Christ.*

These are some of the Points, which I observ'd in reading that Book; and here for a better understanding, I desire to know of you, Whether these are truly and really your Doctrine. The Book, I see, has the Standard-Mark; 'tis Li-cens'd by the Archbishop of Canterbury's

Chaplain; and so must be suppos'd to contain nothing, but what is agreeable to your Church. And if so, how can we choose but be *zealous* of your Calls to *Union*, and *Fair Invitations*, whilst we see you holding out *Reformation* in one Hand, and so much *Papery* in the other? What means your so Good Opinion of the *Pope*; of *Tradition*, of *honouring the Saints*; of their *Intercession* for us; of *honouring their Memories or Monuments*; of *owing a Respect and Veneration* due to their *Relics*; of *allowing Prayers* for the *Souls departed*, as *advantageous* to them, and for the *Pardon of their Sins*; of *believing Christ's Body to be really present in the Sacrament*, and that it is his *Flesh and Blood*? What means, I say, all this? Is this the *Doctrine of your Church*, to which you invite us to *joyn*? If it be, I must tell you plainly, *You are the Men*, I always took you to be, if not *Papists* altogether; at the best, but like those *Imperfect Animals* of *Aegypt*, which beginning to move out of *Mother-dirt*, are left unfinish'd, and in *Colour*, and *Scent*, and the *greatest part* are nothing but *Mother-dirt* still; and into it do naturally *return*. For my Part, if I could come so near *Papery* as this, I should make no Difficulty of taking e'ther Step. For 'tis thither all this do's naturally tend.

What we desire therefore is, That in all your Exhortations to *Union*, you would suppose us to be *rational Men*, and not willing to do any thing, till we see and know what it is we are to do. If you would have us *Unite*, let us know, to what we are to unite; give us a Scheme of your *Doctrines*, of your *Practices*, to which you expect our *Submission* and *Assent*. And when we have this before us, upon Consideration, we shall be better able to know what to do. And particularly, as to the Points above, if they be according to your Church, tell us so: If they be not, be plain with us, and condemn them. Who knows but the *Author* of these

these Positions may be some *Jesuit in Disguise*, who under a Feign'd Shew of *defeating Popery*, designs nothing more than to *promote it*?

One other Point I desire you to add to these, which is that mention'd by Dr. *Tillotson*, in his Sermon at *Whitehal*, April 4. 1679. p. 17. Where he says, That *Private Persons* in understanding obscure Texts of Scripture, and the more difficult Points in Religion, must *rely upon their Guides*: *Because in these Cases*, says he, *every Man is not capable of judging himself, and therefore he must necessarily trust others*: and likewise submit to what is determin'd and establish'd by *public Consent and Authority*, unless upon clear Evidence of the Falseness or Unlawfulness of it: And in Case Men be *perverse and Disobedient, Authority is Just, and may restrain and punish them*. To this Point I desire you to speak clear and plain, that so if we come to you, we may know, Whether in any Points of Religion, we must necessarily go *blindfold*, and *rely upon others*: And that if we cannot submit to all that is determin'd by your *Authority*, we must be unavoidably *restrain'd and punish'd*. This Point is of some concern, because this *trusting* to others Judgment in Matters

of *Doftrin*, join'd with that of *Tradition* above-mention'd, which authorises *Constitutions and Practices* without any Authority of the *written Word*; we can easily foresee, whither they lead; what is there that may not be impos'd upon us, upon these Principles; Whilst we in the mean time, must be oblig'd either to *submit*, or else be *punish'd as perverse and Disobedient*? Be positive in laying open these things to us: Let us know, *which* are the *Difficult Points*, which we must necessarily *trust* to others, and *how many* they are; that so we may know the End of our *Belief*.

We desire Satisfaction in these Particulars, and when this is done, we shall know better how to follow your *Calls*. You'll pardon this Importunity, and in a Friendly Answer consider our *Circumstances*; make things as favourable as you can; and above all things remember, That to hear little of *Trusting*, and less of *Punishing*, will be most acceptable to,

Reverend Sirs,

Yours.

L O N D O N:

Printed, and are to be sold by *Randal Taylor*, near *Stationers-Hall*. MDCLXXXVII.

